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Sport › Tennis

Simona Halep stuns Wimbledon with emphatic victory over Serena Williams in women's final

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Simona Halep played 'the match of her life' as she beat Serena Williams 6-2, 6-2 ton win her first Wimbledon title. CREDIT: PA

By **Simon Briggs**, TENNIS CORRESPONDENT, WIMBLEDON and **JJ Bull**, [LIVE UPDATES]

13 JULY 2019 • 8:44PM

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Saturday's women's final occupied just 56 minutes. So was this an underwhelming return on tickets that started at £185 per seat? You might think so – but only if you weren't there.

In fact, it was a privilege to be on Centre Court to watch Simona Halep – a dedicated and enormously likeable athlete – deliver the performance of her life. In 93 points, she hit only three unforced errors, and you could argue whether the third of those – an unreturned second serve –

should even count. It was the cleanest match played in a Wimbledon final since IBM started cataloguing these statistics in 1998.

The scoreline – a 6-2, 6-2 victory over Serena Williams – might make this sound like a forgettable occasion. But the passion of the 15,000 on Centre Court has rarely reached higher levels.

There was a sense of tension throughout – or at least until the moment when Halep broke for a 5-2 second-set lead – because you always felt that Williams might switch to a higher gear. And there was also a newfound affection for Williams, who has not always been fully celebrated here in the past. It was hard to say whether that stemmed from her mixed-doubles partnership with Andy Murray, or the extra warmth that surrounds sporting greats as they enter their final act.

“I definitely felt the support and the love,” said a philosophical Williams at her post-match press conference, when asked about Wimbledon’s veneration for her and her near contemporary Roger Federer. “I appreciated it. I wanted to do better. I don't think my opponent wanted me to do better today, so...

Halep is overjoyed after beating Williams in straight sets to claim her second grand slam title. CREDIT: ANADOLU AGENCY

“But it's cool. Yeah, no matter which way you look at it, we're not going to be out here in the next three, four, five years. The time is now to get out there and to watch us play, I guess.”

Another reason for the noisiness of the crowd – who offered a standing ovation at the end – was that this was a primary-colours sort of match-up. Weight of shot on one side, fleet-footed mobility on the other. Big country versus small. Unabashed celebrity against publicity-shy introvert. It's hard to say how well the Wimbledon faithful know Halep, but they recognised her intensity from the second point, when she whipped a forehand pass across the bows of the onrushing Williams.

The physical contrast and the power imbalance added extra drama to the spectacle. But it wasn't as if Halep eliminated errors by playing safe, bunting and slicing. She was striking the ball sweetly, not taking the pace off in the way that Barbora Strycova had attempted against Williams in Thursday's one-sided semi-final.

Instead, Halep ran from corner to corner like some tennis version of Forrest Gump. Early in the third game, Williams put three successive shots within a couple of feet of the sidelines – alternating from the right of the court to the left and then back to the right again. Halep was in the tramlines when she hit each reply, but she still finished the point off with a perfectly angled backhand winner.

Defeat was Williams's third straight in a grand slam final and the American remains stuck on 23 grand slam singles titles, still one behind Margaret Court's record of 24.
CREDIT: AFP

"I'm very sure that was the best match of my life," said Halep, a 27-year-old from Constanta who thus became the first Romanian to win Wimbledon. "I knew that I have to be aggressive, being 100 per cent for every ball, that I don't have to let her come back to the match because she's so powerful and so strong."

This was Halep’s second major, after she won last year’s French Open, and it should go down as an even bigger achievement. She grew up on clay, but to win on a grass court – a concept that doesn’t even exist in Romania – took detailed planning and preparation.

Later, Williams sounded understandably put out at the way she keeps running into career-best performances in grand-slam finals. “I don’t think it's a surprise for anyone to play great against me,” she said. “When someone plays lights out, there's really not much you can do. You just have to understand that that was their day today. Hopefully they can play like that more often, more consistently.”

This might sound like a self-serving narrative, but it’s true that a lot of players strike the ball more freely when they go in as the underdog. To rewind to Johanna Konta’s disappointing quarter-final exit for a minute, she would surely have found a higher level if Williams – rather than Strycova – had been on the other side of the net.

Williams embraces her victor Halep after a brilliant performance by the Romanian.
CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

Whatever the explanation, though, it remains an awkward fact that Williams has now reached three of the last five major finals – and not won a set in any of them. This was the heaviest defeat of the trio, but she also lost 6-3, 6-3 to Angelique Kerber here last year, and then also had to settle for six games in the tumultuous US Open final against Naomi Osaka, which Osaka took by a 6-2, 6-4 scoreline.

The upshot is that Williams’s grand-slam tally remains stubbornly stuck at 23, two-and-a-half years after she won the 2017 Australian Open and then stepped away from the tour to start a family. She is desperately reaching for the extra title that would carry her level with Margaret Court's all-time record of 24, but the fates keep snatching it from her grasp.

"I just have to figure out a way to win a final," Williams said last night. "Maybe playing other finals outside of grand slams would be really helpful just to kind of get in the groove. Seems like every grand slam final I'm in recently has been an unbelievable effort to get there. It would be interesting to see how it would be under different circumstances."

A lesser competitor might say "Blast it" and quit the stage. Yet it sounds as if Williams – who has entered hard-court tournaments in Toronto and Cincinnati – will be doubling down with a heavier playing schedule in the build-up to August's US Open. She has never been one to give up easily.

3:40pm **Halep with her dish**

CREDIT: REUTERS

3:38pm **Martina Navratilova**

> It's essential for Serena to play more matches. You can play your way to finals but the lack of fitness shows up. Heavy is the head that wears the crown - the older you get the harder it is to get over those nerves.
>
> I was 20 days younger [when I played my last final] than Serena. I've never been as nervous in my life, just going for my last one. It gets more difficult. Honestly when I got onto court I didn't know if I could get my racket out the bag. Because I knew it was my last chance and it just means so much. You appreciate where you've been... and yeh. Nerves get in the way.

3:30pm Simona meets Kate

This is sweet. Halep does a curtsy as she is introduced to the Duchess of Cambridge.

3:20pm Simona Halep is Wimbledon women's singles champion

> **That winning moment...**
>
> **Congratulations Simona Halep - you were INCREDIBLE!🏆#wimbledon #bbctennis pic.twitter.com/d6soXTjCdF**
>
> **— BBC Sport (@BBCSport) July 13, 2019**

3:19pm I love these moments

CREDIT: AFP

That's when she knew. So cool.

3:17pm Halep seems slightly pleased

Have you ever played that well before?

> Never. It was the best match. Serena has inspired us so thank you for that. I have worked hard for this.
>
> I had nerves, my stomach was not well before the match but I knew there was no time for emotions, came on court and did my best.
>
> It's unbelievable. It's something very special, I will never forget this moment. It was my mum's dream. Thanks to my parents!
>
> I told people in the locker room if I win Wimbledon it will be amazing because I get membership for life!
>
> Actually I have worked a lot to change my game to win matches on grass. It was never easy because you can't run a lot on grass, I started to feel the ball when it came to me I knew what to do with it. I can't wait to come back here.
>
> I would like to thank my country, I have a lot of support every time I play.

You know you get to meet Duchess of Cambridge and Duchess of Sussex now too?

> That's amazing. I didn't know that. Thank you for coming everyone from the royal family, it's been an honour to play here.

3:13pm Serena Williams says

> She literally played out of her mind. Congratulations Simona! It was a little bit deer in headlights for me. When a player plays like that you just have to take your hat off.
>
> I've just got to keep fighting, keep trying, I love playing the sport. Playing in front of you guys is literally a joy.
>
> My team is amazing, thank you for all the support and I love you all.

And she's away! About as quick as her actual performance on the court.

3:09pm They'll be dancing on the streets of tennis tonight

Specifically in Romania. Halep collapses to the floor after realising what it is she's just managed to do. Now she's up and smiling as the presentation starts.

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

3:06pm SIMONA HALEP WINS WIMBLEDON!!!!

Wow.

3:05pm **Williams 2-6, 2-5 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)**

I'm going to just copy the phrase 'Williams hits the net with a backhand' so I can paste it in future use in this game.

Halep is 30-0 up. Then 40-0.... Williams is done. Incredible.

SIMONA HALEP FOR THE WIN! Let first service. Let first service again.

3:04pm **Williams 2-6, 2-5 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)**

If Halep is always this good, why doesn't she win every tournament? Is it just because Williams is having an absolute 'mare? It's like Williams didn't realise she'd have to play a 10/10 game to win today.

Anyway, here we go! Biiiiiiig moment in tennis coming up.

3:03pm **Williams 2-6, 2-5 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)**

Williams hits the net. Break point. Oh my lordy lord I did not expect this today. When they said 'JJ you're liveblogging the tennis, it's Williams vs Halep' I just thought ah well that'll be a two sets win for Serena but here we are. And Williams pulls it out the bag! She's at Advantage now! Still acting weirdly on the court, talking to herself, confused as to why she keeps playing so badly. 24 unforced errors so far.... compared to Halep's three. 40-40.

Another backhand into the net! Advantage Halep. All

Halep needs to do is hit the ball to Williams' backhand and she's won this match.

Fault on first serve. Halep is too good on the rally! She's broken serve again! Halep is one game away from winning Wimbledon!

3:00pm **Williams 2-6, 2-4 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)**

Someone should check the locker room to make sure the real Serena Williams isn't tied to a chair inside it. She's made an error in the first point, then shot straight into the net on the second and her mum in the crowd is making 'what's she playing at' motions with her hands. 15-30. And back to 30-30 to the roar of the crowd.

Williams launches an Ace for 40-30 and isn't happy about it, more annoyed at herself for remembering how to serve at this late stage of the game. And she's slow to another ball, making it deuce. Again.

2:58pm ***Williams 2-6, 2-4 Halep (*denotes next to serve)**

CREDIT: REX

Way better from Williams. Her forehand return is placed too far away for a return and it's 0-15. She has to just launch one in the air to keep it in play on the next point but it drops out and Halep is 15-15.

Williams gets a bit of luck on the next rally, her backhand skipping over the net after hitting it. A hand of apology but she'll be pleased with that and it doesn't matter anyway, because Halep has just pulled things back to 30-30.

Halep summons the power of Thor for her next serve and has Williams yelping like she's stepped on Lego trying to get it back over the net. Then it's game!

2:54pm Williams 2-6, 2-3 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)

Wow. Halep is doing something special here, playing the game of her career. She's having to run back and forth like she's on a bouncy castle and Williams just can't keep up - even though Williams is putting ridiculously powerful shots into the corners, Halep is able to sprint and reach them! 0-30 and Williams looks worried.

And then it's 15-30 but Halep is in the zone and puts too much on a return to beat Williams at the net for 15-40!

Two break points. Williams hits the net on first serve, Halep is thrown around the court, somehow manages to get the ball back from the far corner and Williams has an easy shot at the net to claw a point back. AND SHE'S MISSED IT!

Williams looks like she knows this isn't her day. Halep breaks serve again!

2:50pm *Williams 2-6, 2-2 Halep (*denotes next to serve)

Williams draws inspiration from me for her first return of this game, hitting the ball miles wide and out. Halep is relentless and gets to 30-0 immediately after, Williams rushes to the net, the two exchange spinning drop shots until Halep launches it high in the air, it's in! Williams gets a safety lob shot in but Halep smashes her volley with spin away from Williams to get to 40-0 and wins the next point too. Too many mistakes from Williams.

2:47pm Williams 2-6, 2-1 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)

Halep hits the net for 15-0, Williams does the same for her next serve but catches Halep out completely with a clever little drop shot. Halep slips as she tries to rush to it and that's 30-15.

Williams disguises a backhand to reach 40-0... and game!

2:44pm *Williams 2-6, 1-1 Halep (*denotes next to serve)

Williams shanks her first return for 15-0, Halep hits the net for 15-15. There's so much anger in Williams' hits, Halep has started messing up when the ball is struck right at her and is also making loud grunting noises. Williams gives the floor a little stroke with her trainer and seems to think the grass is her enemy too, having a couple of little stumbles so far this match. 40-30 to Halep after another well placed shot and Williams backhands wide for game!

2:41pm **Williams 2-6, 1-0 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)**

Williams starts the second set but gets her racket caught underneath her feet (I know this doesn't make sense but that's what happened) and McEnroe is giving it all "there's no way she should miss that point". 0-15.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
COME ON!" yells Williams as she reaches out to tap over the net as Halep bursts around the court.

At 30-15 up Williams then stops screaming at small creatures on the ground below her to smash shots with so much anger that they're leaving a trail of fire behind them. Williams batters a shot way too hard for 30-30, Halep can't get to the next for 40-30 and that's because the serve was 118mph, which is mental.

Game! Halep over-hits, Williams holds serve.

2:35pm **Williams 2-6 Halep - HALEP WINS FIRST SET!**

New balls and Williams smacks the first one out of play for 15-0. Halep punts into the net for 15-15 but pulls out another return while stretching to reach it and Williams can't lift it over. 30-15.

Halep is then able to get another shot over the net that you wouldn't expect her, or anyone who runs at the speed of a normal human, to get and it's set point.

Williams batters the return down the line for 40-30. But it's game! First set to Halep!

2:31pm **Williams 2-5 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)**

Williams gets 15-0 immediately, Halep hits the net for 30-0, Williams places a shot on the far line for 40-0, aaaaand it's game.

CREDIT: REX

2:30pm ***Williams 1-5 Halep (*denotes next to serve)**

Williams has advantage, the crowd seem to be on her side too and make approving noises for that. Halep is working hard to get to shots at the back of the court and manages to to get it back to 40-40 before a powerful serve for Advantage.

It looks like she Aced Williams on the next serve but fault is called... and Halep is equal to power strikes from Williams to smash another beauty into space away from reach. Game!

2:28pm ***Williams 1-4 Halep (*denotes next to serve)**

This is much better from Williams. She's gone full 'aggressive grunt sounds' mode and powers her shots to the back of the court, winning the 0-15 point with a little drop shot afterwards.

Halep is able to get past Williams at the net with another superb reverse-cross-shot (I have no idea if that's what you call it) for 15-15 and Williams is up to 15-30 by winning another rally. Halep's serve has too much juice on it for a controlled return for 30-30, Williams hits the net for 40-30.

What a return that is! Halep's second serve is fired back with biscuits for 40-40.

2:23pm

Williams 1-4 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)

Williams is 30-0 up before you can say 'oh they're playing again I should stop looking through the picture database for famous fans in the court' and she easily deals with Halep's running on the next point to get to the more normal sounding score of 40-0 from her serve.

Game! She's arrived.

2:22pm

Two unknown tennis fans in the crowd

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

2:21pm

*Williams 0-4 Halep (*denotes next to serve)

What does Halep have now after that dream start? The answer is many tennis shots all over the court and she's found the absolute top corner, postage stamp, of said court to catch Williams out as she moves to the net.

Williams is long with another backhand for 0-30 but Halep looks surprised to have to get a forehand on the next shot and shanks it out for 15-30.

And then Williams is way wide. It's like she hasn't warmed up or something. The power is back on the next rally to recover for 30-40, Halep looks a little sharper though... Ace!

That's game.

2:17pm Williams 0-3 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)

Williams serves wide left, moves it top right afterwards and Halep can't get there in time to get behind her shot, sending it into the net. Was going wide anyway.

What a shot from Halep! Williams hasn't turned up yet and although she's sending Halep sprinting left to right, she's dead quick and able to get to what looked like a winner, firing it back across Williams for 15-15.

Another backhand from Williams hits the net. I'm no expert, but I think she should stop doing that.

"COME ON!" yells Williams as she gets to 30-30... but she goes waaaaaay too hard with her - you guessed it - backhand and there's another break point!

Fault on first serve. AND IT'S GAME! Did not expect this.

2:14pm *Williams 0-2 Halep (*denotes next to serve)

Apparently Williams looks wound up (McEnroe said that and I tend to trust his opinion over mine) but she's not showing it with any real power on her forehands. Her backhands keep being struck directly into the net but you don't get any points for that! If anything it's minus points... and Halep is 40-0 up in no time at all. And that's game.

Williams looks a little rattled.

2:12pm Williams 0-1 Halep* (*denotes next to serve)

Williams starts, Halep whacks her first return straight into the net. Halep recovers to get to 15-30 but another return hit into the net makes it 30-30. There are already some jokers in the crowd trying to get famous by yelling stuff in the quiet moments.

Ooohhh and there's a break point already! Williams' second serve isn't great, Halep hits it back a bunch of times and Williams finds the net again. And then Williams hits out! Halep breaks serve!

2:09pm Warmups are done!

It's time for tennis.

2:03pm The players are out on court

Both players come together for the coin toss, Williams is swinging her racket around to warm up but it might be a smart bit of mental trickery. It's a bit like the scene in Indiana Jones when the lad does all the fancy moves and then Indie shoots him.

1:59pm Theresa May is here

And so is Meghan Markle!

CREDIT: PA

All the stars. And Theresa May.

1:56pm John McEnroe on managing nerves

> I couldn't get relaxed! We didn't make this walk because the lockers were a lot closer. There's a fine line between being pumped up and being calm.

1:39pm Chris Evert on what Halep needs to do

Sue Barker suggests Serena's movement isn't great right now. Evert adds:

"Not only deep movement, short angles, get Serena off the court. Draw her into net where she's not as comfortable - she has to play smart."

Barker and Evert then arrange to have a coffee later, which is really nice.

1:22pm Kate's here

CREDIT: PAUL GROVER

In a surprising twist, it has been announced that the Duchess of Cambridge will be replacing Halep as Williams' opponent. Seems a bit unfair on the rest of the competitors but that's tennis.

1:20pm Williams arriving

CREDIT: PA

That's Serena arriving with her coach, who I'm convinced is Ian McShane in character.

1:13pm tennis tennis tennis

Hello! Welcome to a liveblog for another game of tennis - this one's important! That's because Simona Halep has to try and beat the last boss, Serena Williams, in order to win the shiny Wimbledon trophy, which is actually a plate, which is called a dish. The Venus Rosewater Dish will be on court, waiting to be taken to its new home in one of these two excellent tennis players' homes - but where does it go? Do people still have mantels for pieces? Or is that something your parents did? Are they just called mantelpieces?

The current holder of that prestigious dish is Angelique Kerber, who lost to Lauren Davis earlier in the tournament, but Serena has won it seven times and will quite fancy an eighth today. Halep is right up against it having only won a single Grand Slam tournament - the French Open in 2018 - and has never reached a final on grass.

Odds on both players are pretty weird but clearly, Williams is the favourite. At 20/37 (I have never seen this before) she is expected to emerge victorious against the 33/20 underdog (again, what is this fraction?) but anything can happen in a final. Unless Serena Williams turns up.

Perhaps the best way to work out the difference in levels between the two players is by looking at Williams' 'Filmography' section of her Wikipedia page. It is about 10 times the size of Halep's Grand Slam win section.

Serena Williams' filmography on Wikipedia

The match tennises off at 2pm officially but will likely be slightly after that. You can watch it on BBC One or follow all the action with us right here. Marvel as I invent new ways to describe the hitting of a tennis ball back and forth over the net - there are only so many commonly used ones, it's time to go off road.

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